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The Arizona Astonisher and Chronicle

Prescott Public Library Burns in Overnight Fire

4/1/2012 12:01:00 AM

Prescott Library damaged by explosions and fire of unknown cause; Founders Room destroyed; Library closed until further notice; City Council to meet in emergency session

Special to "The Astonisher"
by José Cuervo Rojeña

Exhausted firefighters conduct mop-up operations in the Prescott Library parking lot on Sunday morning.

PRESCOTT - Early this morning the Prescott Public Library was rocked by numerous large explosions and a subsequent fire which caused extensive destruction to the first floor of the Library. Early reports indicate that the Founders Room, where many Library and outside groups meet, appeared to have sustained the greatest damage.

There have been no reports of death or injury because the Library was unoccupied at the time of the explosion. However, Prescott Fire Department officials caution that the area has not yet been fully inspected for damage or trapped victims.

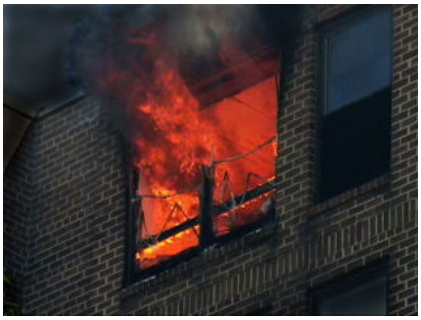
A Fire Department source stated that the remainder of the Library has suffered extensive smoke and water damage and, at this point, unknown structural damage. As a result, the Library has been closed to the public until further notice. Later today it is expected that structural engineers will inspect the entire building to determine whether it may safely be entered in order to make repairs or recover any undamaged equipment or books.

According to Prescott Mayor Marlin Kuykendall, it is anticipated that the Prescott City Council will meet in an emergency session later this week to discuss the Library fire and consider some form of funding to rebuild the facilities as soon as possible. Mayor Kuykendall stated, "Right off the top of my head, I don't know what we can do to fund the repairs but we're having Staff look into this situation as we speak."

Library Director Toni Kaus stated that she was too busy to give an in-depth interview to "The Astonisher" at this time. She apparently had to deal with a dangerous situation caused by numerous disappointed children breaking through established fire lines to congregate at the damaged Goodwin Street entrance. The children were attempting to attend a previously-scheduled book reading and bug-eating challenge event, a hallmark of the Prescott school system's Spring Break schedule. "For their own safety, we simply can't allow anyone to stay in this dangerous location and eat bugs," said Ms. Kaus. "I'll have to see if we can move the bug-eating event to the (Courthouse) Square instead."

Library Director Toni Kaus attempts to restore order while turning away children hoping to attend a bug-eating session.

She also stated that from fragmentary reports given to her, it appears that the entire first floor of the Library was greatly damaged, is quite possibly structurally unsound and may be unable to support the upper floor. "If that's the case," she said, "it's likely that the entire building would have to be torn down and rebuilt." She pointed out that the Library was closed in 2005 for a major renovation which took about a year to complete. "And now it looks like we'll have to start all over and inconvenience our patrons once more. And in that case, they might give up reading completely. It seems that for some reason we just can't stop rebuilding this wonderful Library," said Ms. Kaus as she quietly wiped away a tear.



A major three-alarm fire destroys books and equipment at the Prescott Public Library.

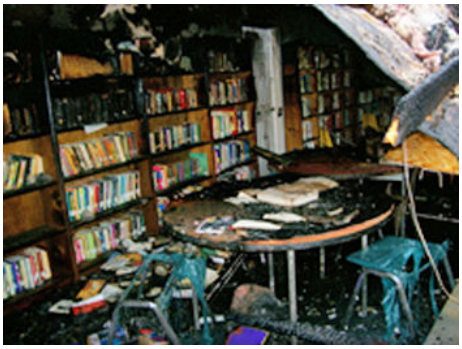
Ms. Kaus was unable to state when or if any temporary facilities might be made available for the public to use while the Library is under construction. With nearly all their books and equipment damaged to some degree, she felt it was unlikely that even if any suitable accommodations were found, they would still be unable to properly serve the public.

When asked about the upcoming annual "Jazz in the Stacks" fund raising event, Ms. Kaus stated that she had not yet begun contacting possible alternate locations. She thought perhaps arrangements might be made to hold it at Starbucks or some establishment on Whiskey Row. "But," she continued, "an event at Starbucks just doesn't have the same ambiance that you find in the Library stacks."

The cause of the explosion was not immediately known, but sources available to "The Astonisher" indicate that the Fire Department's Arson Squad is looking into what has only been described as "suspicious circumstances." No further information has been officially released but a preliminary investigation by "The Astonisher" may help to shed some light on the unexpected chain of events which precipitated this disaster.

Special Investigation by "The Astonisher"

Many different clubs use the Founders Room to hold their meetings and we contacted one of the heaviest users, the Prescott Computer Society (PCS), for some additional information. When questioned about the fire, their President, Carl Rayson, stated his surprising and apparently sincere belief that the Library was "haunted by unknown evil forces." When asked to explain more fully, Mr. Rayson said that at many times presenter's equipment simply refuses to work, computer settings are changed at random and "things just go up in smoke." He then launched into a long, rambling and difficult-to-follow discussion about the many misfortunes that his club and its presenters have endured over the years.



The children's reading area suffered from extensive smoke and water damage.

In spite of his confusing interview, Mr. Rayson did eventually provide one or two good leads and other individuals were able to be contacted. As a result, "The Astonisher" has been able to document numerous examples of Library presentations gone terribly wrong without adequate explanation. It is clear that in spite of presenters' extensive work and testing at home prior to the actual meeting, something always happens at the Library which makes all such attempts at preparation completely useless.

Former PCS President Randy Ettie was contacted but would only state in clipped tones that "None of my presentations EVER worked at the Library." To illustrate his point, Mr. Ettie reported that once a perfectly good laptop computer was ruined while he was giving a presentation. "The damn thing just froze up and nothing I did could get it working again." Disappointingly, no one associated with the generally well-respected PCS "Golden-Aged Geek Squad" (GAGS) was knowledgeable enough to fix Mr. Ettie's computer and it had to be sent back to the factory for repairs.

Bill Fall, a major PCS presenter who describes himself as a self-appointed Photoshop expert, initially insisted that his presentations always go smoothly at the Library. It was only after persistent questioning that Mr. Fall stated, "When things go bad, I just start talking about layers which confuses everyone so much they almost never notice that my presentation has crashed. And if that doesn't work," he added, "I simply move on to the subject of hex math and color curves. That immediately glazes their eyes over and then they stop asking me those annoying questions."

An unidentified firefighter watches helplessly as the Founders Room burns early Sunday morning.

Another PCS presenter and club Secretary-General, BJ Lurke, admitted that he actually called in an exorcist approximately a year ago in a desperate attempt to deal with the problems he had experienced at the Library. Mr. Lurke, who prefers to be addressed as "Your Excellency", stated that he, along with the exorcist, who he would identify only as "a defrocked priest," hid in the Library after closing one night.

At the stroke of midnight, the exorcist sprinkled pea soup and boxed wine all around the Founders Room, including the equipment in the Audio/Video closet. He then drew mysterious symbols on the carpet using an unknown liquid and mumbled unintelligibly while leafing through what appeared to be some form of user manual. Apparently the late-night markings on the carpet went unnoticed by the usually observant Library staff due to the scheduling of a children's party event which was held early the next day.

Mr. Lurke stated that when he gave his presentation the next afternoon, "Everything went like clockwork. Nothin' broken, nothin' smokin'. Just the way I like it. But it's an awful lot of work to go through for just a simple presentation. They don't pay me enough to lose a whole night's sleep each and every time I get up front. And that wine-in-a-box (the exorcist) used was really vile stuff!" Mr. Lurke also hinted that he was going to contact the PCS webkeeper and convince him to revise the club's bylaws to allow for the payment of salaries to presenters at club meetings.

We also contacted a retired PCS presenter who insisted on being identified only as "Ralph" before he would consent to providing any information to "The Astonisher." Ralph lives a hermit-like existence in a partially-completed structure hidden deep in the Prescott National Forest. Apparently he has been constructing his house for an unknown number of years with very little actual progress.

Camera-shy "Ralph" really needs to get out more.

Initially he was very unwilling to discuss any of his Library experiences, but he eventually stated that he has had several humbling experiences when doing presentations at the Library. "Things just go bad no matter how well you prepare," was all he had to say regarding previous disastrous presentations he has given there.

On the advice of his therapist, Ralph currently juggles chain saws for relaxation. "There's less chance of something going wrong and it takes my mind off what has happened to me in the Founders Room on many, many occasions," he explained. Ralph mentioned that his wife has actually been banned from attending PCS meetings due to "numerous false and mostly unproven allegations" that she exudes some form of destructive aura which completely disrupts computers as well as presentations at the Library. Randy Ettie, later confirmed Ralph's statement and added that "Once she stopped attending our meetings, things did get a little better. And in an effort to increase our membership, we encouraged her to join the other Prescott computer clubs and ruin THEIR meetings for a change. But I still hold her responsible for the destruction of my laptop!"

When asked about when he might complete his house, Ralph sighed and replied that "I expect to finish late this year, probably just in time for the Apocalypse. And if the world really doesn't end then, I think I'll get myself one of those Internet-thingies I've heard a lot about. What do you call them? Oh, yes - a website. I hear they're a lot of fun to design and maintain." Then noting that it was almost Happy Hour, he abruptly terminated the interview and retreated back into his sawdust-filled workshop and a well-deserved obscurity away from the public eye.

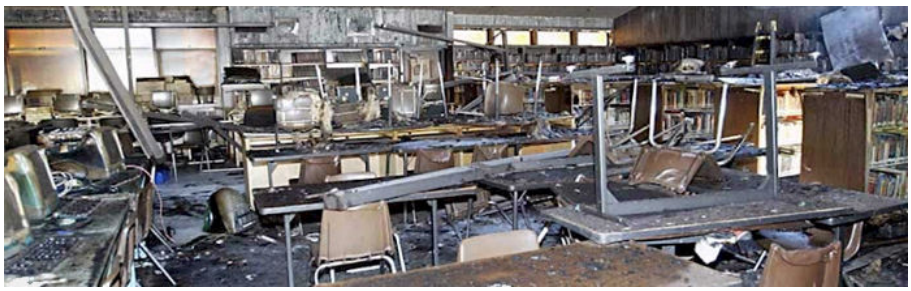
Damage near the book deposit after a frightened driver stepped on the gas instead of the brake.

A much less popular club, the Prescott Mac User Group (PMUG), initially reported quite a different story claiming they never encounter any problems at the Library. "Everything always works for us," proudly stated member Himm Jamb. "That's why I switched over to the Dark Side after owning a PC for many years. Some of my best friends own PCs and, when I'm not laughing at them, I occasionally feel sorry for them. It's worth paying the steep 'Apple tax' for something that doesn't crash and burn at the Library."

Upon further questioning, Mr. Jamb did acknowledge that when PMUG meets at the Library their club rules require they lock all the wheels on the conference tables just in case there happens to be a major earthquake during their meetings. "You can't be too cautious when you're dealing with rolling tables caused by tectonic plate shifts," Mr. Jamb explained. "People might get pinned up against a wall or suffer some equally gruesome fate if those tables suddenly broke loose."

Eager to show off, Mr. Jamb asked his iPhone, which he has rather alarmingly named "Dearie", if it knew the cause of the Library fire. It considered the question for a few moments before responding "I have found 31,416 evil spirits near you. Would you like to contact them now?" Dearie then promptly performed an iCrash and displayed the ever-popular iBSOD (Blue Screen of Dearie). Afraid that he would be tracked by iGoogle and inappropriate iData would be be recorded in the iCloud while he visited the rest room, Mr. Jamb then asked this reporter to guard all his iQuipment for a few moments.

Another unpopular local club which uses the Library on occasion, the Linux User's Group of Yavapai (LUGY), was not able to be contacted. Investigators staked out LUGY's alternate meeting place at the Streets of New York without success. Apparently none of the five members of this computer user group have been seen there since they were told they actually had to buy something in order to use the facilities for their meetings.


All the equipment in the public-use computer area has been totally destroyed by a major overnight fire of mysterious origins. Replacement is anticipated once the City Council approves funding.

Update to Prescott Public Library Fire Article

Since the original posting of this article, it has been announced by Mayor Kuykendall that the City Council, having consulted with qualified engineers, clergy and psychics, has voted unanimously to undertake a massive project to recover from this disaster. It has been decided that the Library will be completely torn down, the ground sanctified by qualified representatives of all the world's major religions and a 16"-thick reinforced concrete slab placed below ground. It is anticipated that these measures will once and for all contain the evil spirits or whatever forces have been at work causing the well-documented difficulties to numerous presenters over the years.

An artist's conception of the "Garden of Peace and Quiet and Serenity and Other Calming Things" to be built on the former site of the Prescott Public Library.

In place of the Library, a walled garden tentatively named the "Garden of Peace and Quiet and Serenity and Other Calming Things", will be constructed. Similar to the constraints imposed by AOL and Apple, this will help ensure that no evil befalls anyone who might dare to approach this area in the future. It is expected the City Council will be asked to pass legislation prohibiting the use of PowerPoint or other presentation materials as well as electronic devices of any kind on the grounds of the former Library site.

By a unanimous vote, the Council has decided to re-assemble the contentious Granite Creek Park bench from its present location in storage and place it in the new "Garden of Peace and Quiet" park. "I think it would be a very nice feature to have right next to the mural," said the Mayor. He was referring to the controversial Miller Valley Elementary School mural which had originally been scheduled for sandblasting. Following massive citizen outcry, it was decided to remove the mural intact and place the matter on the November ballot for the voters to decide its fate.

Mayor Kuykendall mentioned that the final funding for the Garden Park project was not completely assured at this time. He warned that the Council still had to decide about removing the five Copper Basin Road round-abouts and installing conventional traffic lights in their place. "After a few missteps along the way, it looks like that road project is finally coming together. Staff believes that the traffic signals, along with the new speed bumps and cameras, will be the 'magic bullets' which will, once and for all, slow speeds down to a reasonable 15 miles an hour," stated the Mayor.

"Of course," he continued, "we're going to have to dig it all up again in a few years to build the Copper Basin subway line and connect it to the White Spar station. But once that's all done in 2018 or 2019 we'll have an efficient way for residents in that part of town to make a fast and easy trip to either Walmart. It will certainly be worth some minor disruptions to ensure public safety and convenience."

Shoppers crowd into the recently-completed Walmart/Gail Gardner subway station.

Disclaimer: Of course, by now I hope that you have realized that this article has been an April Fool's Day joke and was meant only to entertain and amuse you. If it didn't, I suggest that you reset your Humor settings. These may be found under Tools -- Preferences -- go to the Humor tab and click the "Reset to Defaults" button half-way down the screen. If you have one of the new "Etch-a-Sketch" browsers, simply turn your monitor upside down and shake it gently.

All quotes from people (famous or otherwise) have been a figment of my warped imagination and I am solely responsible for the content posted on this page. Please don't waste anyone's time by calling the Prescott Fire or Police departments, the Mayor's or other City offices, the Library, etc. to obtain more information. The Library is just fine and will be open for its regular business hours.

I hope I made you laugh today.

Ray DeCosta

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